

# Personalizing the Classroom Experience –

Teachers, Librarians and Administrators Connect the Dots with Digital Learning



## Speak Up 2011

National Findings

K-12 Teachers, Librarians  
& Administrators

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Project  
Tomorrow



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**Speak Up**



*“If we teach today’s students as we taught yesterday’s, we rob them of tomorrow.” John Dewey*

While written almost a hundred years ago, John Dewey’s statement about how we are teaching students is more relevant today than ever. Our classrooms are in fact on the front line of a major shift today in the teaching and learning paradigm. The paradigm shift is being driven by a number of factors including the new skills students will need to compete in the global marketplace, the concerns of parents (and employers) about education systems, and the explosion of technology tools that have transformed many aspects of our daily life but have yet to fully infiltrate the traditional school model.

In our first report on the Speak Up 2011 National Findings from K-12 students and their parents, *“Mapping a Personalized Learning Journey – K-12 Students and Parents Connect the Dots with Digital Learning,”* we explored how many students are already personalizing their education outside of school through the use of a wide range of emerging technologies. These new technology tools and services are providing new ways for students (with parental support) to embrace in many ways a “Do It Yourself” approach to learning with supplemental online classes, mobile apps for self-organization and social media that connect students with subject experts. The highly individualized experience that these students are having outside of school is propelling greater interest in personalizing the learning process *in the classroom*. As discussed in the first report, the idea of personalized learning is not new but rather it is the collective advancements in technology that make it possible for educators today to personalize the learning experience more efficiently and effectively for each student.

This concept of leveraging technology to create more personalized classroom experiences sounds logical and straightforward. However, the process of transforming that potential into reality is, in fact, more challenging today than ever before for three key reasons. First, the abundance of new technology tools and services available just within the past two years has created an endless and ever changing set of choices for teachers and administrators; how do you decide which product or app to use, how do you determine quality especially with open education resources, and what support needs to be in place to enable effective usage? Additionally, the multitude of options has also obliterated the intrinsic value of adopting another school’s best practice or model. There are simply too many configurations of possibilities for example, just within the mobile devices space alone, not even mentioning the number of educational mobile apps emerging daily for educators to effectively evaluate which tools will improve student achievement. What may work for one classroom can no longer be counted on to be the best model for another classroom, even within the same school or district. The halcyon days of the “one computer classroom” model that ensured easy replication and minimal customized steps for implementation is in the past. Finally, this diffusion of technology options is impacting the role of the teacher, librarian and administrator in the education process. The classroom teacher’s role in this new world of tech-enabled personalized learning is still evolving. At the heart of personalized learning is the idea of the student mapping their own learning journey, self-directing that path and choosing the mode of educational exploration that best fits their own personal style and interests. The role of the teacher needs to become more of a master chef now, carefully mixing and blending a varied list of ingredients to create a new learning centered environment, and then enabling others to take that recipe and make it their own. At the same time, the role of the librarian media specialist as coach, mentor and guide continues to emerge and focus more and more on the use of different technologies to support this personalized learning recipe. And the role of the administrator, both at the school site and district level, is more critical than ever before in setting the culture and tone for the inherent professional exploration aspects of personalizing learning.





For the past nine years, the Speak Up National Research Project has endeavored to stimulate new discussions around how technology tools and services can transform education and to provide a context to help education, parent, policy and business leaders think beyond today and envision tomorrow. With this year's report on the data findings from the educators' responses, we are providing new insights into how to personalize the classroom experience by first examining how today's teachers, librarians and administrators are using technology themselves for professional tasks and then how those experiences are driving new plans and policies for technology use in our schools. The big question remains: how do we connect the dots with digital learning to more effectively leverage technology to fulfill the promise of personalized learning? The goal for our schools and districts is simple. The effort requires a new level of commitment to achieve success.

### Digital Learning Dot #1 – Educators: Teachers, librarians and administrators are tech users, too.

Increasingly, educators are tapping into many of the same technology tools as students for their professional tasks. And for the same reasons! Teachers and administrators want to leverage personal social networks for greater collaboration with peers. They are interested in un-tethered experiences that allow them ubiquitous access to high quality online resources, anytime, anywhere, any place. And the ability to bring new relevancy and context to their work through the use of rich digital content is essential today. As educators are experiencing the benefits of many of these tools in their own lives, their appreciation for the value of using such technologies in the classroom is elevated as well.

Table 1: How Teachers and Administrators are Using Technology for Professional Tasks			
Technology Use	Teachers	Principals	District Administrators
Participate in webinars	28%	68%	85%
Create multi-media presentations	54%	66%	71%
Participate in online professional learning communities	38%	50%	65%
Create and upload videos, music and photos	65%	56%	55%
Read and/or post to blogs and wikis	34%	33%	43%
Update a social networking site	45%	27%	35%
Use Twitter to communicate or follow others	8%	12%	20%

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Educators have been on a fast track over the last few years to catch up with their students on the use of these emerging technologies, most notably in their adoption of social media and social networking tools. In 2008, only 8 percent of administrators and 22 percent of teachers were regularly maintaining a social networking site for professional reasons. In 2011, we see teachers and administrators are not only tapping into Facebook and LinkedIn as valuable tools but they are now also starting to leverage Twitter as a professional asset. A similar growth in participation in online professional learning communities (PLC) is also impressive. In 2007, one in five teachers was involved with an online PLC; in 2011, over one-third of teachers are collaborating with peers and colleagues through an online PLC. Also noteworthy is teachers' increased comfort with the manipulation of online content components such as videos and music. In 2007, only 37 percent of teachers said that they regularly downloaded music for classroom use, increasing to 65 percent by 2011.

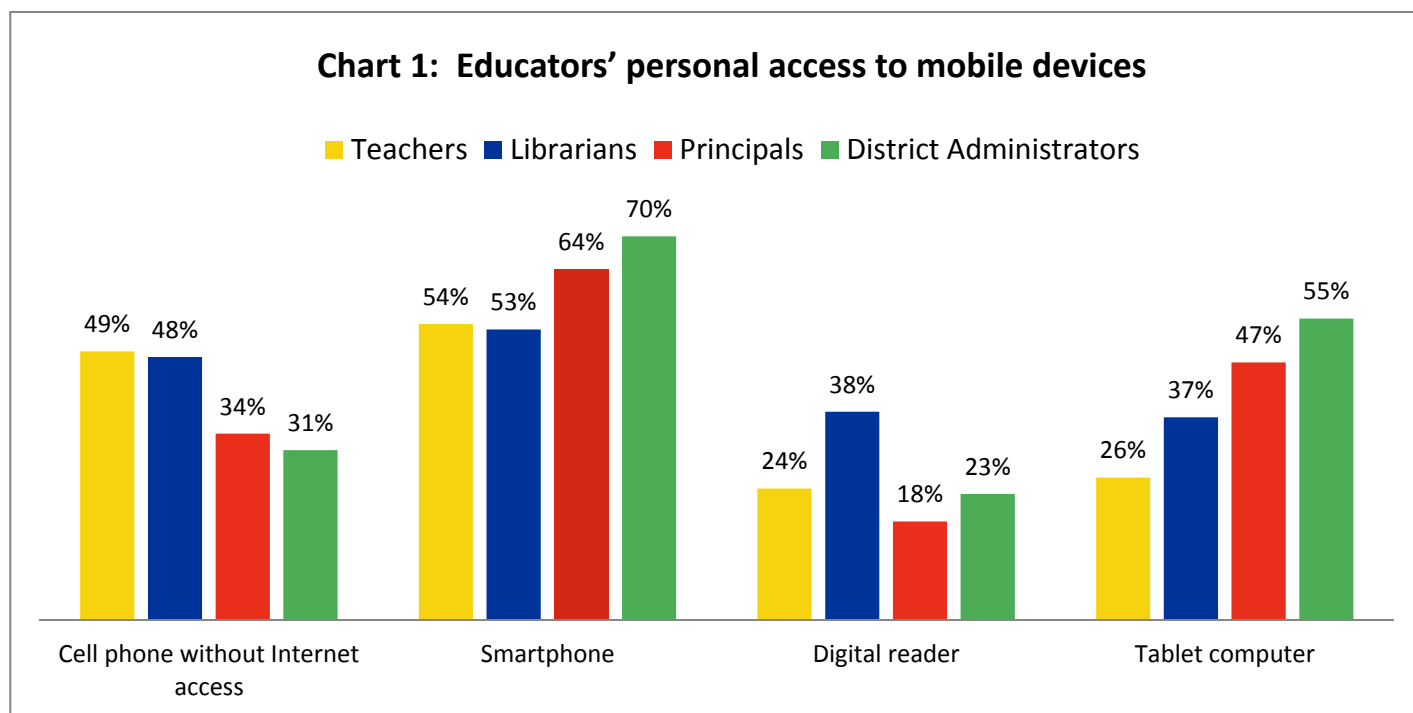
Librarians are also supporting teachers' use of technology in many ways including creating collections of appropriate online resources for teachers to use in the classroom (65 percent), locating digital content such as videos, animations and podcasts to support instruction (51 percent) and evaluating software for classroom use (40 percent). Two-thirds of librarians (67 percent) are also regularly participating in professional learning communities with their teachers. In many schools, today's librarian media specialists are not just supporting their teachers' use of technology but they are also increasing the teachers' capacity for using these tools, especially in terms of digital media and content. Forty-six percent are regularly training teachers on how to not only find high quality digital resources but how to evaluate the quality of those resources and 44 percent have created a library portal of resources for teacher use.

Educators are also increasingly turning to online classes for their own professional development (PD) as well. This trend supports the increased interest that district administrators have for online courses as a way to mitigate continuing budget issues. When asked to identify what tech solutions are being considered to address declining budgets in their school districts, 37 percent of administrators noted online professional development for their teachers as a viable solution. More than half of the teachers and principals (52 percent) said they have taken an online class for training purposes and almost two-thirds of district level administrators (65 percent) as well. This represents a significant shift in the past five years especially for teachers; in 2007 only 21 percent of teachers had taken an online PD course at that time. This increased familiarity with online learning provides a fertile environment for leveraging these tools for personalizing learning for students as well.

Teachers, librarians and administrators are also increasingly becoming "mobilists" or users of mobile devices for both professional as well as personal tasks. Following the student trends discussed in our first report, the emergence of the tablet computer within the past two years has dramatically changed the landscape of educational mobility.







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As teachers and administrators have adopted smartphone and tablet technology, we have seen a continuing decrease in the numbers carrying a simple cell phone or feature phone without Internet access. The shift to the multi-functional devices that provide anytime, anywhere Internet access as well as a plethora of applications to support self-organization and greater personalized interactions is reminiscent of the same shift we have been observing with students and their mobile devices. The new national discussions around mobile devices as a valuable component to creating more personalized learning, and the educators' increased personal familiarity with these devices is resulting in many teachers and administrators re-thinking their perceptions on the value proposition on allowing such devices in the classroom.

Students' increased use of technology outside of school to personalize their informal learning opportunities is creating a new impetus for more tech-enabled personalized learning inside of school. In the same way, as teachers and administrators become more personally familiar with the benefits of mobile devices, online learning and digital media, some of these innovative leaders are also placing new expectations on their schools to better leverage these technologies for learning. While the personal access to a tablet or involvement in an online PD class is not sufficient to drive new classroom paradigms, it does provide a foundation of experience for exploring how to effectively and efficiently connect the dots to personalize the classroom experience for the students as well as teachers. Interestingly, there are several new emerging cohorts of educators who are already connecting those dots, and their views and perceptions on the role of emerging technologies in the new personalized learning classroom are important to understand.





## Digital Learning Dot #2 – Educators: Meet the Pathfinders!

For many of us, we cannot truly appreciate the value of a new technology tool until we have realized a direct benefit from its use in our personal life or in our work life. Online shopping for example was an intriguing concept in theory but had no connection to our real life until we were able to order that perfect birthday gift at 11 pm on a Sunday night and have it gift wrapped and delivered without a trip to the mall. The benefits of convenience and time savings became tangible and highly valued – and most likely resulted in continued virtual shopping trips and probably explorations into other online commerce sites to support our needs for travel planning and restaurant reservations. In the same way, the adoption of different technologies by educators for classroom use often depends upon the realization of a personal benefit and then the ability to extend that value proposition to other environments.

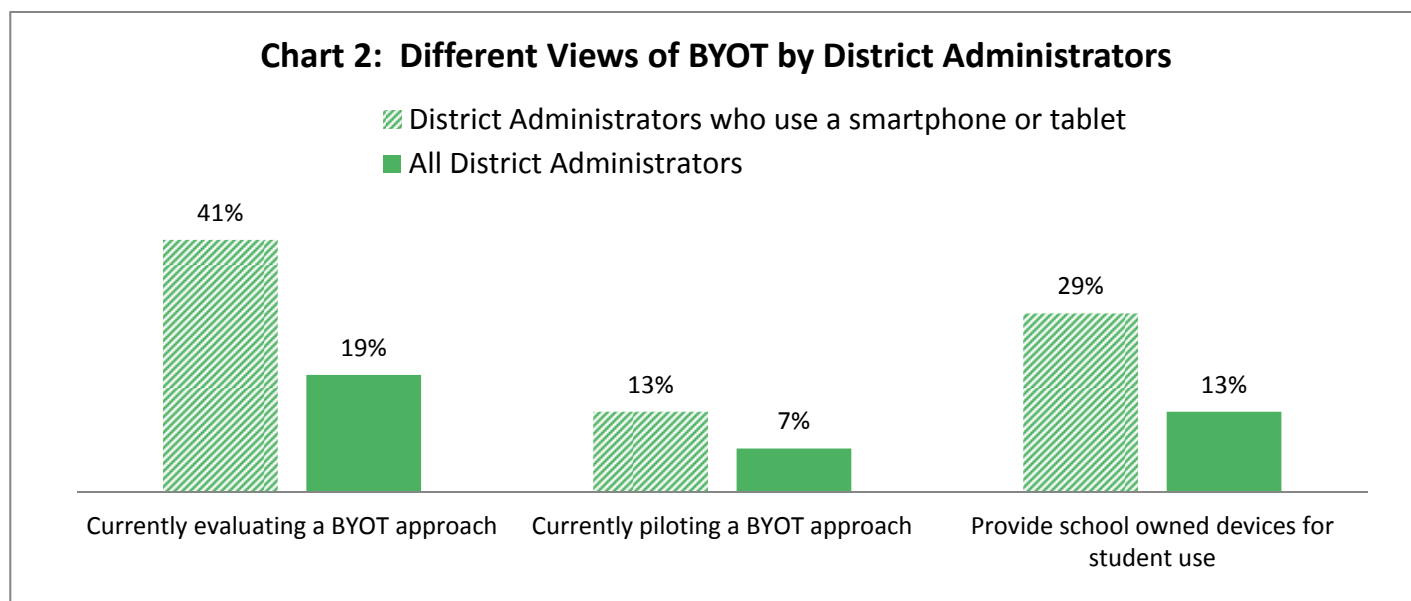
To better understand how the increased familiarity of educators to new technologies is changing the classroom experience, we focused on the views and aspirations of three subsets of teachers, principals and district administrators who are creating new paths with their personal use of technology; “mobilists” who are already using a smartphone or tablet computer; “online learners” who have taken an online course for their professional development; and “digital content producers” who are regularly using digital content for their work tasks. We call the members of these groups the new Pathfinders!

### *Key Findings from the Mobilist Pathfinders*

In general, teachers, principals and administrators who are mobile users more highly value the benefits of using mobile devices within learning than their peers. Mobilist teachers, for example, say that the greatest benefits for incorporating mobile devices within instruction would be to increase student engagement (83 percent), provide access to online textbooks (73 percent) and extend learning beyond the end of the school day (63 percent). Additionally, two-thirds (66 percent) of the mobilist teachers say that a mobile device would provide a way for instruction to be personalized for each student. These top four benefits are echoed by the administrators as well.

The most significant finding however was around the emerging concept of a “Bring Your Own Technology” (BYOT) to school program. With this novel concept, students would be allowed to bring their own mobile device (smartphone, tablet or laptop for example) to school for use within instruction. Many schools and districts are currently debating the pros and cons of this approach as a way to address the financial challenge of providing devices for all students as well as a way to increase the ownership of the learning process by having the student use a technology tool of their own choosing. Over a quarter of district administrators (27 percent) for example identified “students use their own mobile device in class” as a technology solution they are exploring to mitigate the impact of decreased budget funds for education technology. Most notably, district administrators who are mobile users themselves are twice as likely to be piloting a BYOT approach or be evaluating the idea of implementing a BYOT program as other administrators per Chart 2.





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It is interesting that the value of the personal familiarity with mobile devices is also evident with administrators who say that they are already providing a school owned mobile device for their students to use within instruction. Almost a third of district administrators who personally use a smartphone or tablet are already enabling mobile learning at their schools by providing devices for students' use. They are in fact translating their personal value proposition on the use of mobile devices to actual practice and providing an innovative way for students to drive their own educational destiny with mobile learning.

### ***Key Findings from the Online Learner Pathfinders***

Administrators who have experienced online learning for themselves see the benefit of the potential of online learning to increase opportunities for students to have more personalized learning experiences. A majority of district level administrators (52 percent) and a third of school principals (34 percent) would include online classes for students in their vision for the ultimate school for 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. In addition to keeping students engaged in school (47 percent), principals also cite the benefits of providing academic remediation (46 percent) and the ability to provide differentiated instruction for at-risk and gifted students (41 percent) as important aspects of online learning. With a keen eye on school budgets as well, principals are interested in the potential of online classes to potentially eliminate the costs of textbooks (41 percent).

Given this strong interest in online learning, we asked administrators (as well as students and parents) about their feelings on policies that require students to take an online class to graduate from high school. Two-thirds of all district administrators agreed with that requirement. Amongst the district administrators who had taken an online class however, 3 out of 4 agreed with the idea for districts to implement this new policy requirement (75 percent).

This high value proposition for online learning based upon personal experiences transfers to the teachers' views as well on their own future professional development. While 30 percent of all teachers now view online courses as their preferred approach for professional development, amongst teachers who have already taken an online course, 43 percent cite online courses as their #1 preference. It follows then that the teachers with the experience of having





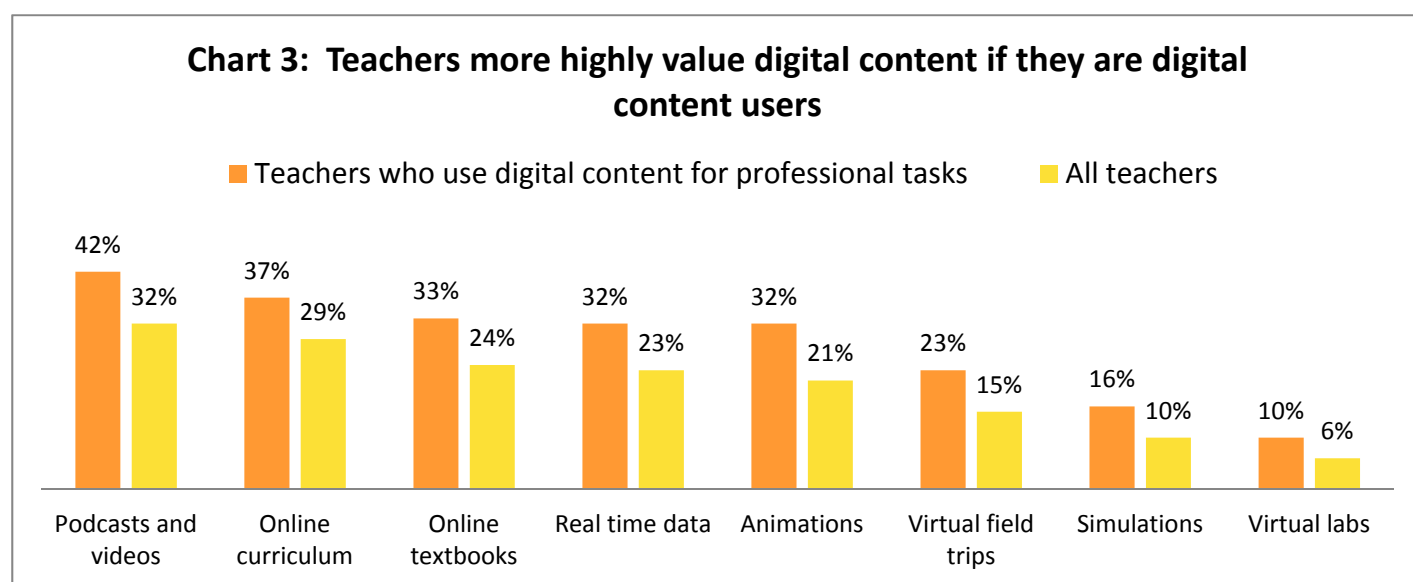
taken an online class would be most supportive of its benefits, noting that it is a better fit for his/her schedule (89 percent), ability to review materials as often as needed (55 percent) and ability to customize the learning process (52 percent) as the top benefits of online learning. This increased familiarity with online learning also translates into greater teacher support for online classes for students. Compared to teachers in general, the Online Learner Pathfinder is 24 percent more likely to recommend online classes for students in their vision of the ultimate school for today's learners.

### ***Key Findings from the Digital Content Producer Pathfinder***

District and school site administrators are increasingly looking at digital content and e-textbooks in particular as important technology solutions for their districts for multiple reasons. In addition to the administrators who see e-textbooks and digital content as a way to reduce dependence on textbook publishers (50 percent) and correspondingly, decrease costs (44 percent), others highly value the impact on student learning and teacher productivity. Within our cohort of school site administrators who regularly are using digital content, the following additional benefits of using digital content within instruction were noted:

- Increase student engagement in school and learning (74 percent)
- Help to extend learning beyond the school day (64 percent)
- Improve teacher skills with technology (52 percent)
- Increase the relevancy of the instructional materials (51 percent)
- Provide a way for instruction to be personalized for each student (50 percent)

The personal value associated with increased familiarity of technology tools plays out again with teachers and their use of specific kinds of digital content in their classroom. Teachers that regularly use digital content in their professional tasks are more likely to use digital content within their lessons and with their students as noted in Chart 3.



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Librarians are also more likely to recommend digital content to teachers if they are digital content users themselves. So, for example, 36 percent of digital content producing librarians are recommending animations to their teachers; less than a quarter of all librarians are doing the same (23 percent). Other types of digital content that Librarian Pathfinders are more likely to recommend include: podcasts and videos (72 percent), online databases (71 percent), and real time data (61 percent) if they themselves are content producers.

When asked about evaluating the quality of digital content for instructional use, the digital content producing librarians are also more discerning and more in tune with the needs of the teachers and students they serve as evidenced by the data in Table 2.

Table 2: Important factors to consider when recommending digital content to teachers		
Important Factors	Librarians who use digital content for professional tasks	All librarians
Accuracy of the content	92%	84%
Ease of use by teacher and student	89%	84%
Alignment to curriculum and standards	89%	81%
Credibility of organization producing materials	78%	70%
Teacher can use the digital content in variety of ways in the class	57%	49%

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The impact of having used digital content to meet your own professional needs appears to definitely transfer to the ideas that teachers have for student learning in their ultimate school as well. And the impact of that digital content usage appears to extend beyond just digital content. So, for example, teachers that have used digital content more highly value digital media creation tools (50 percent) than other teachers (42 percent), more highly value online textbooks (54 percent) than other teachers (48 percent) and even more highly value tablet computers (47 percent) as a learning tool than their peers in general (42 percent).

Given the strong connection between using digital content for professional tasks and usage within instruction to create increased relevancy and context for learning, it is therefore important to understand teachers' perceptions of their needs for professional development experiences and resources.





### Digital Learning Dot #3 – Educators: Personalizing the Professional Development Experience

While increased familiarity with mobile devices, online learning and digital content definitely has a connection to a stronger value proposition in leveraging these tools to personalize the classroom experience, another essential connection point must be professional development. This is especially true for our teachers who are being tasked with creating a new recipe that blends together multiple technology tools and services to create more personalized learning experiences for all students. When asked to articulate the types of professional development experiences that would be most helpful to them on how to better leverage digital content in the classroom, teachers' responses echo exactly the kind of personalized learning that their students crave as well. Just as the students have a vision for personalized learning that is socially-based, un-tethered and digitally-rich, so do their teachers for their own professional development.

As noted in Table 3, teachers value the opportunity for social based learning to collaborate with peers and colleagues in professional learning communities and traditional face to face professional development, and to tap into experts such as the instructional coach or librarian as part of a network of experts. The teachers understand the value of un-tethered learning as exhibited in their interest for online courses as well as a collection of resources that they can tap into anytime, anywhere for just in time PD. They also want to use digital content (videos and podcasts) to learn about how to more effectively utilize such resources, underscoring the value of digital content to bring intrinsic relevancy and context to the learning process. And so, perhaps our students' vision for more personalized learning is not so far removed from the vision that teachers (and administrators) have for their own professional development as well.

**Table 3: Teachers' Wish List for Professional Development on Digital Content Usage**

Digital Content Wish List	Teachers
Access to an online collection of vetted, grade level, content specific resources	56%
Face to face professional development	38%
Video clips of teachers demonstrating use of digital content	33%
Participation in a PLC at my school	32%
Online course	26%
Collection of relevant podcasts	23%
Mentoring by an onsite coach	23%
Support from a librarian media specialist who can help with content identification and usage	20%

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### *Connecting the dots – personalizing the classroom experience*

In our first report on the Speak Up 2011 findings from K-12 students and parents, we illuminated a new path for personalized learning that leverages students' experiences outside of school to inform what happens in the classroom. Now, with this second report, we have brought the teachers, librarians and administrators into this





important discussion about how to create more personalized learning experiences for all students. The educators' increased access and familiarity with emerging technologies such as mobile devices, social media, digital content and online learning is providing a magical moment of opportunity for thinking anew about the use of these technologies in school and how to most effectively tap into these same technologies to revolutionize professional development for our teachers. And as we proceed ahead to create a new shared vision for technology use within learning, we also now realize that we already share a common set of beliefs. No one wants the "one size fits all" approach to learning, not for themselves or their students. At the same time, everyone from the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student to the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher to the curriculum specialist for elementary education has experienced the power of technology to personalize an interaction or learning opportunity. And most importantly, we found that experience to be engaging and empowering. And we know that to provide students with the learning opportunities they need today to be successful tomorrow, our current approach to classroom instruction needs to change. These shared values around the future set up a solid foundation for a new, enlightened conversation about personalizing learning for all learners, students and teachers alike. The call to action from John Dewey is as relevant today as ever. We have an imperative to create learning environments that prepare our students for tomorrow, not rob them of opportunities. The technology exists today to create more personalizing learning journeys – the missing "dot" is simply our will to make this happen for this generation of students. Journey on!



#### *About the Speak Up National Research Project and Speak Up 2011*

Speak Up is a national initiative of Project Tomorrow, the nation's leading education nonprofit organization dedicated to the empowerment of student voices in education. Each year, the Speak Up National Research Project polls K-12 students, parents and educators about the role of technology for learning in and out of school. This survey represents the largest collection of authentic, unfiltered stakeholder voice on digital learning. Since fall 2003, over 2.6 million K-12 students, parents, teachers, librarians, principals, technology leaders and district administrators have shared their views and ideas through Speak Up. K-12 educators, higher education faculty, business and policy leaders report that they regularly use the Speak Up data to inform federal, state and local education programs.

In fall 2011, Project Tomorrow surveyed 330,117 K-12 students, 44,006 parents, 36,477 teachers, 2,025 librarians, 814 district administrators, 3,319 school administrators representing 5,616 public and private schools from 1,250 districts. Schools from urban (24 percent), suburban (41 percent) and rural (35 percent) communities are represented. Over one-half of the schools that participated in Speak Up 2011 are Title I eligible (an indicator of student population poverty). The Speak Up 2011 surveys were available online for input between October 10th and December 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011.

The Speak Up surveys included foundation questions about the use of technology for learning, 21st century skills and schools of the future, as well as emerging technologies (online learning, mobile devices and digital content), science instruction and STEM career exploration. In addition, educators shared the challenges they encounter integrating technology into their schools and districts and how budget challenges have impacted these decisions. The data results are a convenience sample; schools and districts self-select to participate and facilitate the survey-taking process for their students, educators and parents. Any school or school district in the United States is eligible to participate in Speak Up. In preparation for data analysis, the survey results are matched with school level demographic information, such as Title I, school locale (urban, rural and suburban), and ethnicity selected from the Core of Common Data compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics (<http://nces.ed.gov/>). Speak Up data are cross-consulted with NCES statistics to ensure that data represent nation-wide school demographics. The data is analyzed using standard cross-tab analysis. Key variables (such as internet and device access) are tested for statistical significance.



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## About Project Tomorrow

Project Tomorrow® is the nation's leading education nonprofit organization dedicated to the empowerment of student voices in education. With 16 years experience in the K-12 education sector, Project Tomorrow regularly provides consulting and research support about key trends in K-12 science, math and technology education to school districts, government agencies, business and higher education.

The Speak Up National Research Project annually polls K-12 students, parents and educators about the role of technology for learning in and out of school and represents the largest collection of authentic, unfiltered stakeholder voice on digital learning. Since 2003, over 2.6 million K-12 students, parents, teachers, librarians, principals, technology leaders and district administrators have shared their views and ideas through Speak Up.

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